

LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

[Editor's Note: This article is a result of long time collector and author Bruce W. Schank reaching out numerous times to long time collector Fr. Pat Wilhelm.]

Fr. Pat was born in 1939 in Newark, NJ and grew up in West Orange, NJ. He is a 1961 graduate of Rutgers University. In his senior year at Rutgers he converted to Catholicism, and a few years after graduating he entered the Seminary. In 1971, Fr. Pat graduated the seminary and then took on fully the duties of a catholic Priest.

Fr. Pat first became interested in fruit jars in the 1970's. His mother had some Hazel Atlas jars which really didn't impress him much, but she also had a blue Ball Ideal jar. That blue jar fascinated him because of its color and more than unusual closure. He didn't really know much of anything about jars, but in 1975 when Ball Corp. came out with the Bicentennial jars, he happened to see a display of them at the Shop-Rite in Nutley, NJ. He studied that display



and found it fascinating, because the jars were blue like the blue jar his mother had had. So just for the fun of it, he bought one of the jars. Of course, in each and every one of those Bicentennial jars at the time, there was a leaflet in them about Bill Brantley's book, A Collector's



Fr. Pat at the July 2009 Adamstown Show.

Guide to Ball Jars. He thought that was very interesting, and it piqued his curiosity, so he ordered the book.

He read the book all the way through, and it absolutely fascinated him, and there was a very strange interest in it that kind of possessed him after reading the book. It really overwhelmed him, and he didn't understand why, but it did. He read it, and read it over and over, with great fascination, and studied the pictures, and he guesses it just grabbed and took a hold of him. He claims that it still does to a point even 35 years later. Collecting fruit jars has always just seemed to interest him in a tremendous way.

Rare Base of 20 series BPM.



Now being of a somewhat bold nature, he noticed the author's preface as Selma, IN, and he decided in the fall of 1976 that he was going to call him. He went and got the phone number from information and called him out of the blue (no pun intended). To Fr. Pat's chagrin, Brantley told him afterwards that he [Brantley] thought someone had died when he heard a priest was calling. :0) He had a nice chat with Brantley who suggested getting in touch with Arleta Rodriguez, Dick Roller or Alice Creswick, and provided him with addresses and phone numbers. Fr. Pat wrote Arleta and received back a very nice reply from her. Brantley also suggested that he go to the Richmond, IN Jar Show. Fr. Pat wasn't used to driving that far and being puzzled as to how he would get out there, he soon discovered to his delight that you could take a train from Newark, NJ on the National Limited to Richmond, IN, which happened to be one of the pit stops along the way to Chicago.

Fr. Pat took that train to Richmond, IN, and when he

arrived there apparently was an event taking place that very weekend in which one or more women were being ordained as "priests" in the Episcopal Church, and was a big deal at the time. People mistakenly thought he was there to ordain the women, which wasn't the case and something he would never be a part of, and considered personally screwy. So he told them, "no I'm here for a Fruit Jar Meeting and Show", which sounded a bit screwy and totally befuddled them also. It was actually quite amusing Fr. Pat told me, how he and the other people reacted to each other's news.

It was at this show that he met Jerry McCann, (who is a good friend of his to this day) Alice Creswick and Ralph Finch, and he was just overwhelmed seeing all of the tables full of jars. To Fr. Pat, all of those jars were just stunning. In correspondence he had mentioned to Arleta Rodriguez that he was going to the show, and



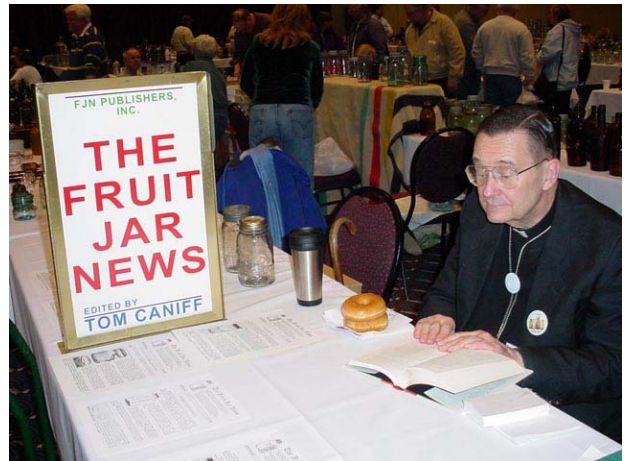
Rare Amber Buffalo jar.

she said to him to look for her dear friend Dick Roller who would no doubt attend the show. He never did meet Dick at that show, but years later after already meeting Dick, he mentioned how he [Dick] had seen him [Fr. Pat] walking around the place. He did buy some jars in fact and stayed at the hotel for a few days, and the whole deal just blew his mind. He thought it was quite a way to start off collecting actually; his first fruit jar show was "The" fruit jar show with "The" leading collectors, and everything else that went with it. That event really hooked him into the hobby big time.

In the fall of 1977, Fr. Pat visited with Arleta Rodriguez and that visit opened up his eyes to how charming and nice people in the hobby could actually be. He felt an uncanny affinity with both Arleta and her husband, as if he had known them for years. In 1978 at his second Richmond, IN Show he finally met Dick Roller, who asked him to come to his home in Paris, IL, which again impressed him very much. Fr. Pat says sometimes people have referred to him as a jar “expert”, but he denies it. He says everything he learned was from Dick Roller, Arleta Rodriguez and a few other people who were the “researchers.” Since he has a good memory, he simply soaked up everything like a sponge that those researchers have shared with him.

He also claims he is in no way disturbed by “collector politics” because it is merely human relations. “The Church has politics and people who get together for anything and all in life will have differing viewpoints on what they are doing. Any jar collector or any collector of anything after the first few years of the hobby has to learn that a lot of what goes on is based on his or her own opinion based on their own experience on amassing their own collection.” So when he sees conflicting prices or even shocking prices then he goes by a few factors; how interested is he in the jar, how often has he seen one for sale, and how much would he want to have one etc. Now depending on those factors, if he sees a good jar

Fr. Pat was at one time was a huge figure for the FJN.



listed for a great deal more than the listed price, he thinks if he hasn't really seen one and he really wants it for his collection he might be willing to pay a higher price for it. So a lot of that is one's own judgment.

According to Fr. Pat, Ball Corp in his early years of collecting was very welcoming and forthcoming with collectors, and if you wanted to know something, they would tell you what you needed to know. So he found Ball jars a lot more interesting than what others did simply because he was able to obtain information on various jars. Now, being friendly with Bill Brantley and Dick Roller very early on was a huge plus too, since he [Roller] was in the midst of heavy Ball researching and working hand in hand with Ball employees, i.e., Brantley. Also at that time Ball Corp was physically rearranging jars and working on the idea of setting up the Ball Museum. Incredibly, a lot of jars were being gathered together and thrown out, and Brantley, Roller and a few of the Ball officials had access to those junk heaps. Fr. Pat told me a lot of good stuff was thrown into those junk heaps by the



Rare Ball Universal jar.

company, and were simply items which they did not want. If they had one example for the museum, they were seemingly satisfied. There were also many different people at Ball headquarters and other facilities that had example runs of jars lying around on their desks and sitting in their closets from different projects. As time went on and as different executives were either being moved or fired, all of the jars started emerging out of the offices. Different officials started to realize a certain group of people were into collecting those jars, and subsequently those same jars became available to collectors one way or another. According to Fr. Pat, "it was more like a friend of a friend of a friend connection" that allowed him and others to get a hold of things.

An example of this is the Ball Universal in his collection. Dick Roller owned the damaged example only because he saved the jar from one of the junk piles. Dick Roller at one point had some serious health issues in the 1980's, and began selling off his collection because he honestly needed the money. Fr. Pat happened to be one of those few collectors who benefited from being close to Roller, since he [Roller] would call him and say, "I have such and such a jar and are you interested in it." Yet Fr. Pat claims there were no bargains whatsoever with him, due to his need of funds. Upon purchasing the Ball Universal jar, he promptly had it professionally repaired.



Rare milk glass Ball Ideal jar.

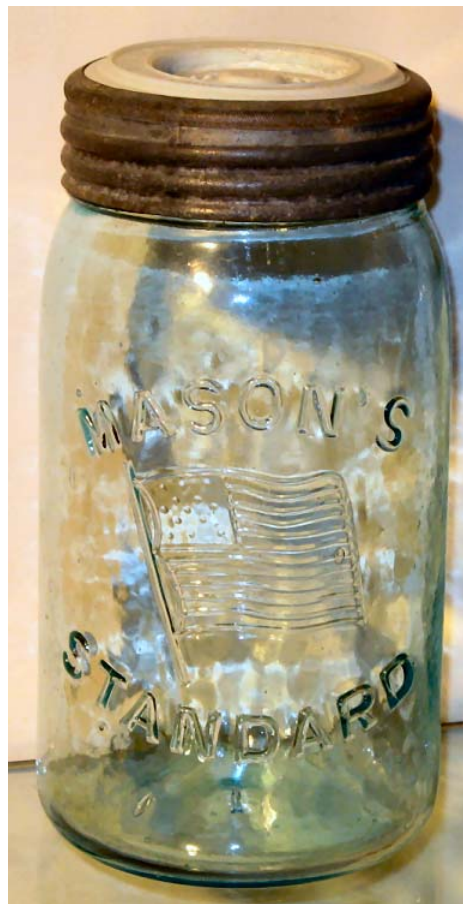
I realize this will sound strange to some, but Fr. Pat mentioned that very early on in his collecting pursuits he decided to enlist the help of God. In 1978 he prayed asking God if he could have a milk glass Ball Ideal jar. His prayer was basic, "Gee God, you know it would be great if I could get one of those milk glass Ball Ideal jars, and you know I'd love to have one God. I'm such a good priest, and I certainly deserve one. So if it's Your will, I'd love to have one." To his great astonishment, in only a matter of a few weeks he received a call (out of the blue of course) from Roller, saying "by the way, somebody's has a milk glass Ball Ideal jar for sale, and I told that person you'd probably be only too happy to buy it." Fr. Pat said, "Yes" and then Roller told him the price was \$1,000. Fr. Pat had never purchased a jar for as much as \$1,000 before, but little did he know at that time that that price would eventually become common place. The person selling the jar turned out to be, of all people, Bill Brantley who was trying to raise money too. So he got the milk glass Ball Ideal jar, and he prayed saying, "thank you God, you know that I deserve this, and I much appreciate the opportunity, and so thank you God. I'll be a very good priest from now on, better than usual." So God told him "See that You Do!" ;o)

Fr. Pat told me a very interesting story about one of his rarer jars in the collection. In 1981 he purchased a Mason's "Flag" Standard, which at the time wasn't even listed in any books.

According to him, this jar is the cousin jar to the Mason's "Shield" Union and the Mason's "Keystone" Keystone. He says his example is in pristine condition, but does not have a closure. When he had the opportunity to buy the jar, he brought along \$300 with him to Lebanon, PA to an old farmer's residence. He claims it was overwhelming when he saw the jar, and he almost had a stroke then. At the time the significance of the jar was not apparent to him, except it was a very attractive jar, and obviously a very rare jar, and seemed to be tied to John Mason himself. Beyond that he claims it was a blank to him.

Not knowing where to begin and literally off the top of his head, he told the old farmer that he could offer him \$100 for the jar. "Oh" the old farmer said, "I probably couldn't get more than \$50 for this at the local flea market." "I offered it to Joe Wenger of Sabetha, KS, and I never got an answer. I better call him up and see what he thinks and what he'll give me." Fr. Pat gasped and thought "Oh God! Don't tell me he's actually going to call this Joe up? He'll offer something for the jar and maybe even more and I'm going to have a problem with this whole situation. Just watch, Joe's going to say he wants the jar, and since the old farmer offered him the jar first, he's going to let him have it." Fr. Pat's heart sank and again thought "Oh God!" He started envisioning all of the negative coming to

fruition. He mentioned to me how he was so close to buying the jar, and how the jar was sitting there calling to him saying, "Fr. Patrick, Fr. Patrick, save me, save me." :O) Anyway, the farmer goes into his home to call Joe. While that was happening Fr. Pat was praying and pleading with God saying, "God, God, You know You really want me to have this jar, so please help me and let it work out that Joe doesn't want it." I believe he also said there were a few "me, me's" offered up in that pray as well. :o)



Rare Mason's (Flag) Standard jar.

Lo and behold a miracle occurred because his prayers were answered, and the most wonderful thing happened; Joe did not answer the phone. The old farmer said, "Well he had his chance, and he didn't answer my letter when I offered him the jar, and now he's not answering the phone, you can have it for \$100.00", and so Fr. Pat was saying to himself, "thank You God!" Now he claims he didn't offer the old farmer a low price to skunk him, because he didn't really know what the jar was worth. Of course he would have given him \$300 if the farmer had asked for that much, but the farmer seemed quite satisfied with the \$100 price. So Fr. Pat jumped into his car and took off

at top speed back to New Jersey, and shortly after the purchase the jar became "known." Fr. Pat subsequently took the jar to the next Show & Tell, which at that time was now in Indianapolis. It turns out that Norm Barnett had acquired one too, but with one caveat, Norm's jar was

broken. Norm was going to show his jar as “The” find at the show, but Fr. Pat as a new collector had somehow bested the old Master himself.

By 1985 Fr. Pat was pretty much a well known and established collector. Bill Brantley contacted him one day and said; “I’m coming through Newark Airport on such and such an afternoon, and I can get off the plane and meet you with some very nice jars that you probably would want to buy. So if you would like to meet me at the Airport, you could look at some very nice jars.” Fr. Pat said, “Yes, yes, yes.” So he went to the Airport and he bought six to eight jars from Brantley, the “debossed” BPM quart being one of them. Imagine this scene; Fr. Pat and Bill Brantley in the Airport Lounge with jars all over the carpet floor. Well suffice it to say according to him [Fr. Pat] he remembers people looking at them both as if they were both crazy. Man I wish I could have been sitting there watching that transaction as it went down.

I suppose there are people who either like or dislike Fr. Pat but in talking with him for 3 ½ hours, I quickly realized that he was more than a character; he was actually very animated, hilarious and quite personable. Plus a very important message came through to me loud and clear too, when it comes to fruit jars; *“it’s not what you know that really matters but who*

you know that ultimately matters, including God Almighty.”

He also revealed to me that at the 2008 Bethlehem show he bought a jar that he never imagined he would ever be able to have for his collection. He called it his “Pinnacle” jar, and told me he paid more for it than any jar he has ever bought before bar none. He claims he never conceived that that jar would ever be available for sale, let alone offered to him. Of course it was offered at what most people would consider an insanely exorbitant price, but he said he bought it anyway. Why pray tell? Because after 30 years of collecting he realized he’d never get a chance to get one of those jars again, and he also felt it was actually worth it, and if he wanted to, he could certainly sell it again to someone for the same price. At the July 2010 Muncie Get-Together, Fr. Pat revealed his “Pinnacle” jar, which happened to be a very rare Bennett’s Perfect Baking Powder quart with Mason’s 1858 patent on the base.

Unfortunately, I was never able to persuade Fr. Pat to allow me to take photos of his jars or even



[Rare Bennett'S Perfect Baking Powder 1858](#)

some of his jars. From what I have been told, only two people have ever seen his collection, and although I was hoping to be the third, it just didn’t work out for me.

Addendum: with the exception of the Flag Standard and the Bennett’s photo, all other photos are of other collectors jars that coincide with jars known to be in Fr. Pat’s collection.